

# Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

## Ahoy Ye Matey! Pirate or Privateer?

Standard:

- II. Time, Continuity, and Change
- III. People, Places, and Environments
- V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
- VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- IX. Global Connections

Grade Level: 9-12

Objectives:

The student will:

- Assess transportation of goods during the Revolutionary Era
- Determine the differences between legal and illegal transport
- Examine motives of individuals involved in war at sea
- Evaluate the role of government in accessing means of transport
- Examine documents as primary sources of information

Time: 1-2 class period(s)

Materials:

Document: **1778** *Treaty of Amity and Commerce* between the United States and France

Resources: *An invitation to all brave Seamen and Marines* (Boston newspaper)  
Reading: *Privateers in the American Revolution*

[www.nps.gov/revwar/about\\_the\\_revolution/privateers.html](http://www.nps.gov/revwar/about_the_revolution/privateers.html)

Image: *An 18<sup>th</sup> Century Privateer*  
*Letter of Marque from John Hancock*

Exercises: *In Congress: Creating a Letter of Marque*

Procedures:

1. Distribute the handout, *An Invitation to all brave Seamen and Marines*.

Ask students:

- a. Does this advertisement entice you to volunteer?
- b. What makes it appealing? Why might it be unappealing?
- c. The "Enemies of the United States of America" are not identified. The specific conflict or war is not stated. What clues might lead to answers?

[The location is **Boston**, even if city is not mentioned. The gathering place is "Head of His Excellency Governor Hancock's Wharf; John Hancock was a Massachusetts representative to the Continental Congress and later governor of Massachusetts, 1780-1785. Built in France in 1778, the ship, *Deane*, is presumably named for Silas Deane of Connecticut, the first diplomat sent to France before Benjamin Franklin's ambassadorship.]

- d. Describe the ship.
- e. What is the mission of the ship?

- f. What appears to be the method by which volunteers will achieve their fortunes?
- g. What is a privateer? Is this the same thing as a pirate?

**Note:** If students are unable to draw logical conclusions based strictly on the advertisement, answers to some of these questions are revealed in the next reading.

2. Provide students with *Picture of Privateer Ship* and handout, *Privateers in the American Revolution*. Questions for students:
  - a. Explain the purpose of a privateer.
  - b. How does the occupation of a privateer differ from that of a pirate?
  - c. How is the U.S. Government involved in privateering?
  - d. Why were the privateers essential to the United States' war efforts?
  - e. How did these men and ships contribute to the commercial needs of the new nation?
  - f. What are Letters of Marque and Reprisal?
3. Have students examine the Letter of Marque issued by John Hancock in 1776. Have students describe what they can decipher. Next, provide the Letter of Marque with information left blank.
4. Students should complete the Letter of Marque while referring to the advertisement posted in the Boston newspaper by Elisha Hinman, Esq. A specific date for this newspaper article is not available. However, information about Elisha Hinman indicates he commanded the *Deane* in November 1780. Despite his position in the Navy created by the Continental Congress, Hinman advertised in the Boston newspaper as a privateer. [See special note at end of lesson for more about Hinman.] The Letter would have been signed by Samuel Huntington, President of the Continental Congress, 1779–1781.
5. Refer students to these sections of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce: Articles 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32. Questions:
  - a. Identify special privileges granted to the privateers.
  - b. What happened to pirates if they acted against the privateers and ship of war?
  - c. What is contraband (Article 26)? Name some items that are contraband and other items that are not. What were privateers to do with contraband?
6. Refer to Article 27 in the Treaty of Amity and Commerce. All ships and vessels of France and the United States had to carry Sea Letters or Passports and Certificates. Questions:
  - a. Why were these documents deemed necessary by the United States and France?
  - b. Present a copy of the Form annexed to the Treaty (last page of Treaty to students. Compare and contrast these documents with the Letters of Marque and Reprisal?
  - c. What would happen if a ship did not carry these forms?

Extension Activities:

1. Refer students to Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution.
  - What is the status of Letters of Marque in the Constitution?
  - Speculate as to why the government has not removed this power from the Constitution.
2. Investigate recent suggestions that the Congressional power of issuing Letters of Marque and Reprisal be used against the Somali pirates. ■

*Special Note*

Elisha Hinman's remains can be found beneath a tall marble monument in Stonington, Connecticut. The following inscription upon the monument was included by Hinman's sons:

In memory of Captain Elisha Hinman, United States Navy, a patriot of the Revolution; born March 9, 1734—Died August 29, 1807, aged seventy three years. At the age of fourteen he went to sea, was a captain at nineteen, and for many years sailed to Europe, and the East and West Indies. On the commencement of the Revolution, he abandoned a lucrative business, and devoted his whole service to his country. He was one of the first appointments by Congress to the navy, and served with honor throughout the whole war – successively commanding the *Marquis de La Fayette*, twenty guns, the *Deane*, thirty guns, the sloop-of-war *Providence*, and the *Alfred*, thirty-two guns. Captain Hinman, in command of the *Alfred*, sailed in company with the *Raleigh*, thirty guns, Captain Thompson. On the ninth of March, 1778, they were chased by two British ships of the line, the *Ariadne* and *Ceres*; and the *Alfred*, after fighting bravely, and being deserted by the *Raleigh*, through the cowardice of her captain, was compelled to surrender. He was taken to England and imprisoned – escaped through the assistance of friends – was taken to London, where he saw hand-bills offering five hundred pounds for his head, describing person, &c. He finally escaped to France. On his return, Captain Thompson was court-martialed and dismissed the service, respecting the loss of the *Alfred*, and Captain Hinman was honorably acquitted. In 1794, when the *Constitution* (old Iron-sides) was launched, President Adams tendered the command of her to Captain Hinman, but from his advanced age, he declined. He died full of years, leaving his character, as a man, of unimpeachable integrity and sterling worth; a rich legacy to his descendants.

<http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wcarr1/Lossing1/Chap56.html>